

VZCZCXRO6005
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHBJ #0982/01 0751657
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 151657Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5834
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 000982

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2033
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET: CHINESE OFFICIAL SCHOLAR CONTACTS EMBASSY
TO GAUGE FOREIGN REACTION TO LHASA EVENTS

REF: A. BEIJING 981

- [1](#)B. BEIJING 980
- [1](#)C. BEIJING 979
- [1](#)D. BEIJING 976
- [1](#)E. BEIJING 975
- [1](#)F. BEIJING 973

Classified By: Deputy Political Section Chief Ben Moeling.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A scholar at an official Chinese think tank requested an urgent meeting with PolOff the evening of March 15 to gauge foreign reaction to the events in Lhasa. The order to do so, our contact said, had come from the "very top" of the Chinese political system and reflects the "great concern" PRC leaders have for international reaction to the violence in Lhasa. The scholar, speaking personally, was nevertheless "pessimistic" that China would find a peaceful way out of the current Tibet crisis, given the Communist system's authoritarian tendencies, the leadership's desire to stay in power and individual rulers' fears of appearing "soft." Nevertheless, international opinion, particularly in advance of the Olympics, is also an important consideration, he said. Reflecting a nearly complete media "blackout" on Tibet-related news in the Chinese-language media, the scholar confessed he had not heard "a single word" about unrest in Lhasa until his superiors told him to urgently assess foreign reaction to "a major incident in China's west." End Summary.

Chinese Scholar Requests "Urgent" Meeting on Tibet

[1](#)2. (C) Professor Dong Lisheng (strictly protect), a longtime Embassy contact and liberal scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), contacted PolOff on the afternoon of March 15 to request an "urgent" meeting. Once face-to-face, Dong revealed that he had been "ordered" by his CASS superiors to quickly canvass his foreign contacts on March 15 and 16 to gauge likely international reaction to the violence in Tibet. Dong said he had been given no message to pass to his foreign interlocutors, only to learn how the international community is reacting to events in Lhasa.

Media "Blackout"

[1](#)3. (C) Revealing what he called an "almost complete media blackout" in the Chinese-language press regarding the Lhasa violence, Professor Dong confessed he had not heard "a single word" about the ongoing events in Tibet until his superiors had ordered him to urgently assess foreign reaction to "a

major incident in China's west." Initially, Dong incorrectly thought his superiors were referring to the recent attempted airplane hijacking. Dong said "almost no one" in China knows about the events in Lhasa. Only after his bosses told him to discuss Tibet did Dong, on his own, access foreign websites such as the New York Times via internet proxy servers to learn the "real story." Dong said he saw reference to Xinhua stories on the unrest in the foreign press, but he had seen nothing from Xinhua in Chinese.

Center "Concerned" About International Reaction ...

14. (C) Dong said he understood the order to canvass foreign opinion on Tibet had come from "the very top" of China's political system and reflects the "importance" with which the leadership views international opinion. Particularly in this Olympic year, Dong said, he thinks China's leaders are keen to assess likely foreign reaction to major moves on China's part, both foreign and domestic.

... But "Harsh" Response in Lhasa "Likely"

15. (C) Dong confessed that "in his personal opinion," the chances of a peaceful resolution that is acceptable to the international community is "highly unlikely." The most "likely" response on the part of Chinese authorities, Dong lamented, is a typically "harsh" reaction against those involved in the protests. Dong cited several factors pushing China's leaders toward a hard-line response: first, the "authoritarian tendencies" of China's Communist system and the "inertia" of decades' worth of experience in dealing harshly with dissent to CCP rule. Second, Chinese leaders first and foremost want to stay in power, Dong argued, and in

BEIJING 00000982 002 OF 002

today's China, social stability has become "brittle," causing leaders to be concerned for stability of the system and their positions. Third, one should not underestimate the personal vulnerability of leaders like President Hu Jintao to charges of being "soft" on issues like Tibet. Accusations of being "soft" could open Hu up to attacks from his "opponents," Dong said, noting that "Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong" would be more than happy to criticize Hu on this score. Finally, Dong said, the center's control over local officials in Tibet is "far from perfect." Even if Hu Jintao were to want to pursue an "enlightened" policy, local leaders almost certainly do not and would view any kind of softening toward Tibetans and the Dalai Lama as a threat to their own positions.

Hoping It Is Not Too Late

16. (C) Dong, who is a liberal, said he personally agreed with PolOff's arguments that what is needed now is restraint and the use of peaceful measures in the short-term, and the initiation of dialogue with the Dalai Lama in the long-term. PolOff underscored that, with the entire world watching China's response to the unrest, China has an opportunity, particularly in the run-up to the Olympics, to demonstrate tolerance, openness and maturity in dealing with this crisis. Dong agreed, saying he hoped it was "not too late," again stressing that, in light of his orders to gauge foreign reaction, there "may still be time" to influence China's response to the events in Lhasa.

RANDT